

# ***I4A* ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF AREA AGENCIES ON AGING**

2365 Country Road, Belleville, IL 62221-2571, Phone (618) 222-2561, Fax: (618) 222-2567

## **Testimony White House Conference on Aging Listening Session Chicago, Illinois December 8, 2004**

Area Agencies on Aging have the primary task of planning and coordinating services and programs for older people with a regional focus. Our efforts revolve around providing the most appropriate services in the least restrictive environment. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to members of the White House Conference on Aging Policy Committee on behalf of the Illinois Association on Area Agencies on Aging and to share our issues and concerns.

For over 35 years Area Agencies on Aging have effectively met the needs of older adults. A solid base for current and future services has been built. It is time to concentrate our efforts and focus on supporting the desire of people to age in their communities and dedicate the resources to do so. We must build on our base to assure choices are available to older adults. It is time to take a critical look at the services and resources available to meet the needs of the current and future aging population. Before building, we must strengthen this base to effectively meet the needs of older adults throughout the country. The Federal Government must maintain its commitment to states and communities to meet the needs of older adults by supporting the existing system and assure that future funding reflects the demographic changes and inflation.

As coordinators and providers of community based services we recognize that with the array of supportive services available to enable older adults to remain independent in their homes and communities there are still needs going unmet. In Illinois we are maximizing the resources available. Our State's nutrition providers have home-delivered meal wait lists. With our population growing and the demands increasing, maintaining the supportive services currently in place is a challenge. Funding for such services has not kept up with inflation or the growing aging population. Supportive services such as transportation, senior centers and services supporting caregivers save money and delay unnecessary placement of individuals in nursing homes. Funding has not kept pace with population growth and these services are at risk. Aging policy needs to recognize that remaining at home is the preference of older adults and community based supportive services are more cost effective than institutional care. We must work in collaboration with stakeholders to make the transition, to community based care and provide choices to make the transition successful.

Family Caregivers are providing approximately 80% of community based services. We, in Illinois, have wait lists for respite services and are limited to the level of services that can be provided. The National Family Caregiver Program has been a lifesaver for many caregivers by creating and increasing information for caregivers, respite care, counseling, support groups, and training. We must take this a step further and focus on those caring for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and support their efforts as well as maintaining the level of current service provided.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services (CMS) and the Assistant Secretary for Aging Services must coordinate their efforts more than ever before. A partnership must assure that older individuals with disabilities have access to services inclusive of information, education and counseling to people with Medicare. These services should be provided in partnership with CMS. Efforts must be made to work together to ensure the integrity of the Medicare program. A partnership should be extended to state units on aging to ensure that older adults have access to the most appropriate care setting, to develop the state's Olmstead plan and in efforts to rebalance long term care.

We must maintain the integrity of the Aging Network and Older Americans Act services. Our focus must be on providing choices that allow older adults to remain in their homes. We must address today's demands along with future needs by dedicating resources and coordinating our efforts that allow us to provide the best services for our country's older adults.

Joy Paeth, President  
Illinois Association of Area Agencies on Aging